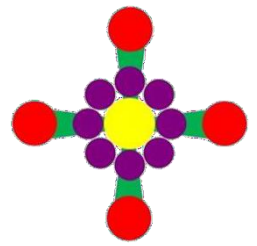


The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 28 April 2024
The Fifth Sunday of Easter



The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the Lord has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

Isaiah 49.13

Jesus said, 'This is indeed the will of my Father,
that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life,
and I will raise them up on the last day.'

John 6.40

Invitation to Confession

God shows his love for us
in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Let us then show our love for him
by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Confession

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins,
and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength,
and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

Absolution

Almighty God,
who in Jesus Christ has given us
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,
forgive us our sins,
open our eyes to God's truth,
strengthen us to do God's will
and give us the joy of his kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

New Testament Reading: Acts 8:26-end

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot

and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his word.

Gospel Reading: John 15: 1-8

Jesus said: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his Holy word.

Reflection from Richard

Jesus said: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

Our two readings today are linked by these two ideas.

In the second reading Jesus talks of how those who follow him must be like the branches of a vine, strongly linked to the main stem. In the first reading we have the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch. He longs to understand the scriptures that he is reading which speak of a suffering servant who is the chosen one of God. On hearing that this Messiah is Jesus and that Philip is one of his followers, the eunuch asks to be baptised.

Baptism is the sign that we are disciples of Jesus, that we are branches of the vine.

It is great to be part of something. There is a community, we are never alone if we are a part. We are also able to offer our gifts and talents to add to the wealth and treasure of the group as a whole.

I have often enjoyed using a tool for team building where people are set a problem. They have to imagine that they are stuck on the moon, separated from their spacecraft. They are given a list of twenty items and they have to rank them in order of how useful they are as they seek to get back to safety.

It is difficult to draw on much experience or knowledge, but usually people manage to make a list in their prioritised order.

Once they have done this, they then gather into groups and facing the same problem creating a new list with priorities that they agree on as a group. There is often a good amount of discussion and disagreement!

They are then given the list which the experts at NASA consider to be the definitive answer to the problem and they mark their individual lists and their group lists. They score better marks if their list compares well with the NASA answer and they score badly if they make less wise choices.

And the wonderful result is that invariably people score much better when they

work together as a group than the scores when they tackled the problem as individuals. It highlights that we are better together than on our own.

Jesus wants us to be branches in his vine. He does not want us to be alone or to face the world individually. But rather he longs for us to be his disciples and to bring our gifts, talents and our individual characters together to be a community, the branches of one vine.

And he longs too for us to be fruitful.

Already on the trees and bushes there are the tiny buds which will eventually grow into the fruit. The quantity which we enjoy in the autumn will depend on many things: the rain and the sun, the warmth and the bees to name but a few.

And we can be more fruitful or less fruitful in God's sight dependent on the conditions which we create.

Jesus longs for us to be strongly connected to him; to know his love and his light; to know his presence with us day by day; to learn from him and to follow him.

If we do these things then we will grow fruitful in ourselves and also be fruitful in bringing others to know the wonder of being a branch on the vine too.

I have no doubt that, if you have a garden, then in the next few weeks you will be doing plenty of pruning. When you do, take notice of the branches and remember the words of today's readings. As you see the fruits begin to form on the trees, remember that Jesus said: My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Profession of faith

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession with Robert Priestley

Loving Lord Jesus, we know that you know everyone of us personally, and are fully aware of all our needs, our worries and concerns. But it is still necessary for us to take a moment, put some time aside, and think of all the people and places in the world and at home where your loving touch, your healing power and your comforting presence is needed. And so, we offer these prayers, asking that you intercede and help in all the ways that are possible.

Firstly Lord, we think today of those whose hearts and minds are dominated by violence and war; the victims who have lost loved ones, homes or livelihoods; those who live in fear; those who are pursuing war, and those who are seeking peace.

And Lord Jesus, we also offer up all those who are struggling financially; those whose land is poor and whose crops have failed; those without enough to pay for food and utility bills. We thank you for those who offer help through food banks, warm spaces and credit unions.

Loving Lord Jesus, we pray for all those who are part of our health services, for doctors, nurses, health care assistants and administrators. We thank you for the work done in our hospitals and health centres and we think of those who use them because they are unwell physically, mentally and emotionally. Be with all of those mentioned above, Lord, and bring your loving touch into all of their situations.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

And now we thank you Lord, for all churches and communities of worshippers; for the love and support they offer and the teaching and prayer they provide. We pray for all who seek to share your good news with friend and stranger that what they say may be heard, understood and taken seriously.

We pray for ourselves and for all those who are part of our lives; those whom we see often and those whom we encounter only occasionally; for those we see face-to-face and those we interact with by telephone and social media; for those we help and support, and for those whose help and support we receive. Help us all, Lord, to have the confidence to speak out and spread the good news that you are there for everyone who accepts you into their lives.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

And finally, thank you, Loving Lord, for friend and casual acquaintance, for those we know by name and those whose faces we recognise; for those who share our pilgrim journey in whatever way. Help us always to remember, that in any encounter, you are present and you offer your guidance and comfort. May we grow in and through you now and always.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us,
lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.**

Amen.

Song of Praise

Our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from death,
we praise you for changed lives and new hopes at Easter.

You come to Mary in the garden,
and turn her tears into joy.

For your love and mercy we give you thanks:
we praise your holy name.

You come to the disciples in the upper room,
and turn their fear into courage.

For your love and mercy we give you thanks:
we praise your holy name.

You come to the disciples by the lakeside,
and turn their failure into faith.

For your love and mercy we give you thanks:
we praise your holy name.

You come to the disciples on the Emmaus road,
and turn their despair into hope.

For your love and mercy we give you thanks:
we praise your holy name.

You come to your people now,
and turn our weakness into triumph.

For your love and mercy we give you thanks:
we praise your holy name.

Final Prayer

Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Blessing

Eternal God, giver of love and power,
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:
confirm us in this mission,
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Sending Out

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.
Go in peace to love and to serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen